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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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In 3/4h
HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, November 28, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Questions and Answers." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "Leather Shoes," "Floors and Floor Coverings," and "Housecleaning Made Easier."

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While I have been devoting all my programs this week to Thanksgiving, the questions have been accumulating. I'll answer as many as I can today.

Here's one that will interest everybody, about the care of leather handbags, billfolds, wallets, pocketbooks, and such things. I asked a specialist in the Bureau of Chemistry whether these articles required any particular care.

"Never allow leather articles of this type to get wet," he said. "Carry them where they will not be rubbed, and bent, and exposed to perspiration. Don't keep leather articles in very warm places, because leather that is very dry is harsh, cracky, and easily scuffed. You can lengthen the life of uncoated grain leathers by the use of a leather dressing. Castor oil, or vaseline, may be used for traveling bags, suitcases, and upholstery leather. Russet leather, however, is somewhat darkened by such treatment. Apply a little dressing on a piece of soft cloth, work it in well, with the hands, and then rub the cloth lightly and evenly, over the entire surface of the leather. After a short interval, rub the leather briskly, with a clean, dry cloth, to remove excess grease."

"That's good advice," I told him. "Now perhaps you can tell me how to remove mildew, from leather articles. I had a leather suitcase, once, which was accidentally stored in a damp cellar. The mildew changed the color of the leather. What should I have done with it?"

"Any leather article is almost sure to mildew, if kept in a warm, damp, and dark place, such as a closet, cellar, or stable," said the leather expert. "This mildew probably doesn't make the leather less serviceable, unless it's allowed to remain too long, but it may change the color, and injure the appearance. The simplest way to prevent mildew is to keep the leather in a well-ventilated, dry, well-lighted place, preferably one exposed to the sunlight. When mildew develops, it should be washed off with soap and warm water, or simply wiped off with a moist cloth. Dry the leather well afterward."

Now, if you don't mind jumping from leather suitcases to fruitcake, here's a question that I think will interest everybody.

"When should I frost my fruit cake?" asks a woman who wants her fruit cake in tip-top condition for Christmas. "And what is the best way to keep fruit cake?"

The Recipe Lady says that fruit cakes should not be frosted until just before serving, because the white frosting is likely to loosen, and become discolored, as the fruit cake is stored.

"Now, as to keeping a fruit cake. After it is entirely cold," she says, "wrap it in waxed paper, or parchment paper, and place it in a tight container. Some persons like to put in with the cake an apple, cut in half, or a piece of cheesecloth, saturated with cider. Look at the cake, from time to time, to see that no mold is appearing."

Third question: "Is there any food value in the meat left over from soup-making?"

Answer: The left-over meat has food value, although it is rather flat in taste. Left-over soup meat can be used in croquettes, baked hash, or as filling for stuffed peppers, and sandwiches. With added onion flavor, soup meat makes very good salad for luncheon or supper. Marinate the meat with French dressing, mix with chopped celery or other vegetable, and serve on lettuce.

Next question: "Please tell me what to serve as accompaniments to soup."

Answer: Thin toast, toasted rolls, crackers, or saltines are always good served with soup. If you want something different, put the crackers in a pan, brush them with melted butter, sprinkle with grated cheese, and bake until delicately brown. The crackers burn easily -- watch them carefully while they're baking. Or you may use stale bread, buttered, cut in cubes, and browned in the oven. The French call these toasted bits of bread, "croutons."

I had a number of requests last week for directions for frying oysters. Here's how I fry them:

First, select nice large oysters. Drain the oysters, and look them over carefully, for small pieces of shell. Have ready some finely sifted, dry breadcrumbs, seasoned with salt and a little pepper. Dip each oyster in a well-beaten egg, to which 1 tablespoon of cold water has been added, and then roll the oyster in the seasoned crumbs. Now, place the oysters on a pan, or board, and allow them to stand, until the egg and bread coating has hardened.

The next step is to heat the fat, in a frying kettle, until the fat is hot enough to brown a bread crumb in 40 seconds. Then carefully place the oysters, a few at a time, in a wire basket, lower them slowly into the fat, and cook until they are a golden brown. As you remove the oysters from the kettle, put them on paper to absorb the excess grease. Keep the oysters hot until all are ready to serve.

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By the way, oysters, like all sea foods, are rich in iodine. Iodine is the mineral, you know, needed to prevent goiter. It's a good plan to eat some of these sea foods regularly.

Another question: "Please tell me how to clean aluminum cooking utensils."

In cleaning aluminum, never use strong soap, or strong washing powder, because the alkali in strong soap or washing powder will discolor the metal. The dark color on aluminum pans may be rubbed off with whiting, or with fine steel wool. If you use steel wool, get a grade Double O, which is the finest grade sold. Discoloration on aluminum may also be dissolved by the acid of vinegar, but be sure to wash all the vinegar off, thoroughly. Steel wool, I find is the very best cleaner for keeping aluminum pots and pans bright and shining.

It seems as if the housekeepers in every part of the country were concentrating on cleaning just now. A woman in Maine wants to know if it is safe to use scouring powders on bathroom fixtures.

Bathroom fixtures, tubs and bowls, are hard to keep clean without a scouring powder. However, nothing coarser than whiting should be used. Some of the commercial cleaning preparations contain scouring agents so gritty that they scratch the surface, and make it harder and harder, to keep clean. I'm going to send her the bulletin, "Housecleaning Made Easier." There she will find the care of the bathroom explained in detail.

Here's another query, from Florida: "Can you tell me how to clean ordinary plastered and papered walls and ceilings?"

Ordinary plastered and papered walls and ceilings should be cleaned with a soft wall brush, or a broom covered with soft cloth, such as cotton flannel. Use light overlapping strokes in cleaning; heavy strokes rub the dirt in. Cotton batting is good for cleaning places that soil more quickly than the rest, for example, the wall over radiators, registers, and stoves. The wall should be rubbed lightly with the cotton, which should be turned as it becomes soiled. There are, on the market, commercial pastes and powders for cleaning wall papers, but these should be applied by an expert. An amateur is likely to have a streaked wall if he attempts to use them.

And this question comes from Texas: "How many times a year does a floor need rewaxing?"

Under moderate use, a floor needs re-waxing only two or three times a year. Applying too much wax is a common mistake. The extra wax lies on the surface, in a soft coat, that collects dust, and is easily marred. To clean a waxed floor, sweep it with a soft brush or a mop entirely free from oil. Oil softens wax, and should never be used on it, in any way. Occasionally, a waxed floor should be given a more thorough cleaning with a cloth wrung out of warm soapy water, or better still, with a cloth moistened with turpentine or gasoline. Water dulls and whitens a waxed floor. Turpentine, or gasoline, dissolves the film of dirty wax on the surface, and leaves it bright. However, in using gasoline and turpentine, remember that they are inflammable. Don't use them near an open flame, or have a large quantity around at a time in an open vessel.

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Just one more question on cleaning, today:

"Please tell me how to remove paint and varnish, which have been spattered on the window pane."

That's easily answered. Paint or varnish spatters on glass may be dissolved with turpentine or alcohol, or rubbed off with a dull knife.

Monday: A menu and more about Fruit Cake.

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